

February 10, 2006- Rahall Joins Sheriffs' Association & Chiefs In Condemning Cuts To Law Enforcement

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WASHINGTON, DC - U.S. Rep. Nick J. Rahall (D-WV) expressed concern that the newly released budget from the White House focuses more on protecting foreign countries than protecting Americans at home.

The proposed \$1.1 billion in cuts continue a disturbing trend by the Administration and Republican leadership in Congress of significantly slashing funding for critical state and local law enforcement assistance programs and brings the total cuts to law enforcement to more than \$2.3 billion since September 11, 2001.

"We have to work together to protect our citizens," Rahall said. "Why are programs that play essential roles in this mission on the chopping block?"

In the proposed budget, Justice Department officials have eliminated the \$128 million for the COPS Law Enforcement Technology grants program. COPS, which stands for Community Oriented Policing Services, is a program that began during President Clinton's administration and has distributed funding to put more police officers on the street and help deploy technology. Greenbrier, Raleigh, Cabell, and Pocahontas counties, along with Beckley, Lewisburg, Bluefield, Marlinton, Milton, Princeton, Rainelle, Summersville and Huntington officers, are among those that have received COPS grants recently.

"West Virginian parents, who are trying to protect their families, have to wonder why the COPS program, used to protect families in southern West Virginia with more police officers, is essentially killed off in this proposal," Rahall said.

Raleigh County Sheriff Danny Moore echoed Rahall's concerns, calling the program "the lifeblood of a lot of law enforcement's activities."

"I can't stress enough how important and valuable this program is to Raleigh County and to many of our smaller communities," Moore said. "COPS is a valuable tool to help maintain manpower and hire more deputies as some are being activated by the Guard and Reserve."

Additionally, Moore said he hasn't received much funds from homeland security grants and doesn't expect to with the way the President has restructured them.

"It's bad enough that we have to find replacements for these fine officers, but to take away the funds that help make that possible is more than just an inconvenience, it's an injustice, Rahall said."

In addition to the elimination of the COPS program, the Administration is also proposing the elimination of the Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Program at the Department of Justice, and the Law Enforcement Terrorism Prevention Program (LETPP) at the Department of Homeland Security. Each of these programs help state and local law enforcement agencies increase their effectiveness and have greatly improved anti-terrorism efforts.

The National Sheriffs' Association has called on its members to take action immediately on the proposed cuts.

Writes Sheriff Edmund Sexton, President of the National Sheriffs' Association in a letter to fellow law enforcement officers:

"Quite simply, these proposed cuts would be devastating and could force many of us to cut back on services or reduce our manpower in critical areas such as narcotics task forces. Ultimately, crime will increase and our communities will be less secure. ... Please contact your member(s) of Congress and your Senators directly and let them know how critical the JAG program and the COPS program are to you and law enforcement agencies in general."

The International Association of Chiefs of Police, too, have condemned Bush's budget.

"These cuts have the potential to cripple the capabilities of law enforcement agencies nationwide and will undoubtedly force many departments to take officers off the streets, leading to more crime and violence in our hometowns and ultimately less security for our homeland," said Mary Ann Viverette, President of the IACP.